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White House Chose Not to Report Denial by Castro

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 12—The White House was aware of the contention by President Fidel Castro of Cuba that he had tried to stop the invasion of Zaire's Shaba Province by Kantangans based in Angola, but chose not to make it public, Jody Powell, the President's press secretary, said today.

"I know of no obligation of this Government to release all private statements in a public forum," Mr. Powell said at a news briefing.

The Administration made the Castro message available to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week, almost one month after it had been received on May 17, and when Congressional ques-

tions were being raised about the evidence to support the President's denunciation of the Cuban role in the Katangan attack.

Mr. Powell said that before President Carter denounced the Cubans last month the White House was aware of Mr. Castro's contention, which had been communicated through Lyle F. Lane, the chief United States diplomat in Havana, on May 17.

'All the Factors Available'

The President charged at a news conference in Chicago eight days later that the Cubans not only had known of the Katangans' invasion plan but "obviously did nothing to restrain them from crossing the border."

Mr. Powell said that the President's

charge "was an assessment with all the factors available, appropriately considered."

"It has not changed," Mr. Powell said. In response to questions, the press secretary said that he did not know if the President himself had been aware of Mr. Castro's contention before last month's speech, but other White House officials were aware of the Cuban leader's position, and "the statement was made with that in mind," Mr. Powell said.

Mr. Powell sidestepped reporters' questions about whether the White House believed that Mr. Castro had simply lied. But he noted that the Cubans had denied any involvement in the Katangan invasion and said that they had a poor record for telling the truth.

Other Administration officials privately

indicated that the White House did indeed doubt that Mr. Castro had taken steps to restrain the invaders. They noted that Mr. Castro had said that one reason his intercession failed might have been that President Agostinho Neto of Angola was ill and staying in the Soviet Union at the time.

One Administration official said that, given the seriousness of the situation, had Mr. Castro sought to stop the invasion he would not have been deterred by Mr. Neto's absence and would have gone to other Angolan leaders and to leaders of other Africa nations to head off the attack.

Mr. Castro's statement came to light last weekend after Administration officials briefed members of the Senate Foreign Relations committee.

In a related development, Mr. Powell said that Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance would be available to brief senior members of the House International Rela-

tions Committee who had written to President Carter to request a clarification of the Administration's policy on the Soviet Union.

Mr. Powell said that the Administration had been considering holding foreign policy briefings for members of Congress, and added that Secretary Vance planned to honor Congressional requests for explanations of American foreign policy.

Representative Clement J. Zablocki, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, and 13 other committee members, wrote President Carter asking for clarification of American-Soviet relations.

"Many members of Congress are embarrassed by their current inability to answer questions from their constituents as to what is U.S. policy on such issues as Soviet-American relations and Africa," the letter said.

"There is confusion and doubt as to just what our policy is with respect to

several critical areas of foreign policy," the letter continued.

The Congressmen also expressed concern over the potential negative effects of this confusion on the negotiations for a strategic arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union. "There is concern in the committee whether it is in our own national security interests to permit developments in Africa to adversely affect our overall relations with the Soviet Union," the letter said.

Thailand Reports Border Attack

BANGKOK, Thailand, June 12 (AP)—Thai border policemen repulsed a force of Cambodian soldiers and Thai Communist rebels in northeast Thailand, killing six, when they tried to seize a frontier village over the weekend, police headquarters reported. The police said two Thai villagers were killed and three policemen were wounded during the battle 300 miles northeast of Bangkok.

Castro Summons a U.S. Diplomat, Denies Cuban Involvement in Zaire

NY TIMES

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

19 MAY 1978

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 18 — President Fidel Castro has given the United States personal assurances that Cuba is not taking part, directly or indirectly, in the invasion of Zaire by rebel forces based in Angola, Administration officials said today.

They added that the Cuban leader, in a highly unusual move, summoned the chief American diplomat in Havana to his office last night to deny charges by Zaire that Cubans were involved in the fighting on the side of the invading rebels. The rebels were originally from the province of Katanga, now known as Shaba, in southeastern Zaire.

It was the first time that Mr. Castro received the diplomat, Lyle F. Lane, since he arrived in Havana last September to take over the American interest section, under the Swiss Embassy.

Because Cuba's offices in Washington and those of the United States in Havana are less than formal embassies, the two governments agreed that their diplomats would not have access to higher than third-ranking diplomatic officials.

U.S. Did Not Endorse Zaire's Charge

The United States, although highly critical of the estimated 20,000 Cuban troops in Angola, did not endorse Zaire's charge that Cubans were involved in the fighting in Zaire, centering on the copper center of Kolwezi. But some high officials were willing to believe the charge, especially since Cuban forces have been active in other parts of Africa and in Southern Yemen.

If Zaire's accusation of Cuban involvement was confirmed it could provide the United States with stronger justification to intervene in Africa than has existed up to now.

In Angola and in Ethiopia—the main areas of conflict involving Cubans—the Cubans were invited by the governments to put down insurgents and invaders. The invasion of Zaire from Angola has been condemned, by contrast, by Washington as a violation of Zaire's sovereignty.

Mr. Lane's report of his meeting with Mr. Castro, which occurred in the Cuban leader's office, received priority attention in Washington, since it seemed to officials that Mr. Castro intended his assurances to be read by President Carter.

According to officials, it was impossible to tell whether Mr. Castro was being completely candid since it has been assumed here for some time that Cuban forces in Angola had at least some advisory role with the Katangans, who have

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lived in Angola since leaving Zaire, then known as the Congo, in the mid-1960's.

Mr. Castro, however, would not discuss Cuba's role in the massive Ethiopian effort to crush the Eritrean independence movement. The United States has been critical of Cuban and Soviet support for this effort.

'No Cuban Troops We Know of'

When asked today about whether the United States believed Cuba was involved in the fighting in Zaire, Tom Reston, a State Department spokesman, said that "there are no Cuban troops we know of" in Zaire.

Mr. Castro was categorical in his denial, according to Mr. Lane's report.

Officials here said that the go-ahead had been given for the speed up in delivery of "nonlethal" military equipment already ordered by Zaire and newly requested in recent days.

The aid had been held up by a technical problem—Zaire had been in arrears on payment of \$400,000 owed the United States.

This has been settled and such supplies as spare parts, medical supplies, communications equipment and gasoline were on their way.

Officials would not say what role the United States was playing, if any, in the airlift apparently under way from Belgium and France to rescue foreigners in the Kolwezi region.